

The Compassionate Approach

WORKSHEETS



**These worksheets work best after you've watched
'The Compassionate Approach' video**



Self-Compassion

Practising Self-Compassion

My Emotional Systems

Building a Strong Soothing System

**A Compassionate Approach
Towards Voices**

Grounding and Mindfulness

Building a Sensory Box

If this is your first time exploring your voices, it may be helpful to work through these worksheets with someone you trust to keep you feeling safe and supported. This could be your:



Family



Friends



**Clinicians and
support workers**



This can be a helpful video to watch as it introduces a compassionate approach towards voices: <https://youtu.be/VRqI4lxuXAw>



Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is an attitude towards our selves that shows warmth, kindness, empathy and understanding- especially when we are going through tough times. Showing ourselves compassion involves harnessing a non-judgmental stance and understanding that being imperfect, making mistakes and facing challenges are part of life and growing. In order to show oneself compassion we need to pay attention and be aware of our emotional, physical, relational and spiritual needs and nourish them the best we can.

Self-compassion can be shown in many different ways including the way we act, talk, and behave towards ourselves. When we are stressed, overwhelmed or feeling unsafe, self-compassion involves nurturing ourselves and learning what soothes our mind and body.



Reflection

Take some time to reflect on how compassionate you are towards yourself and answer the questions below.

How often do you show yourself compassion?

If you aren't currently practising self-compassion can you think of a time when you have in the past?

When you first start practising self-compassion, a good starting point can be to imagine having a conversation with someone you care about. If a friend came to you with a similar problem, what would you say to them? How would you treat them? Practise treating yourself the same way.

If you struggle to be compassionate towards yourself, why do you think this is?

Were you taught or did you observe self-compassion when you were younger? Have you ever had the chance to develop your self-compassion?

If being compassionate towards yourself is difficult or feels uncomfortable this may be something you need to work on. A lot of people struggle to show themselves compassion and it often doesn't come naturally. Like any new skill it will take practice and perseverance to make it a habit.



Self-Compassion

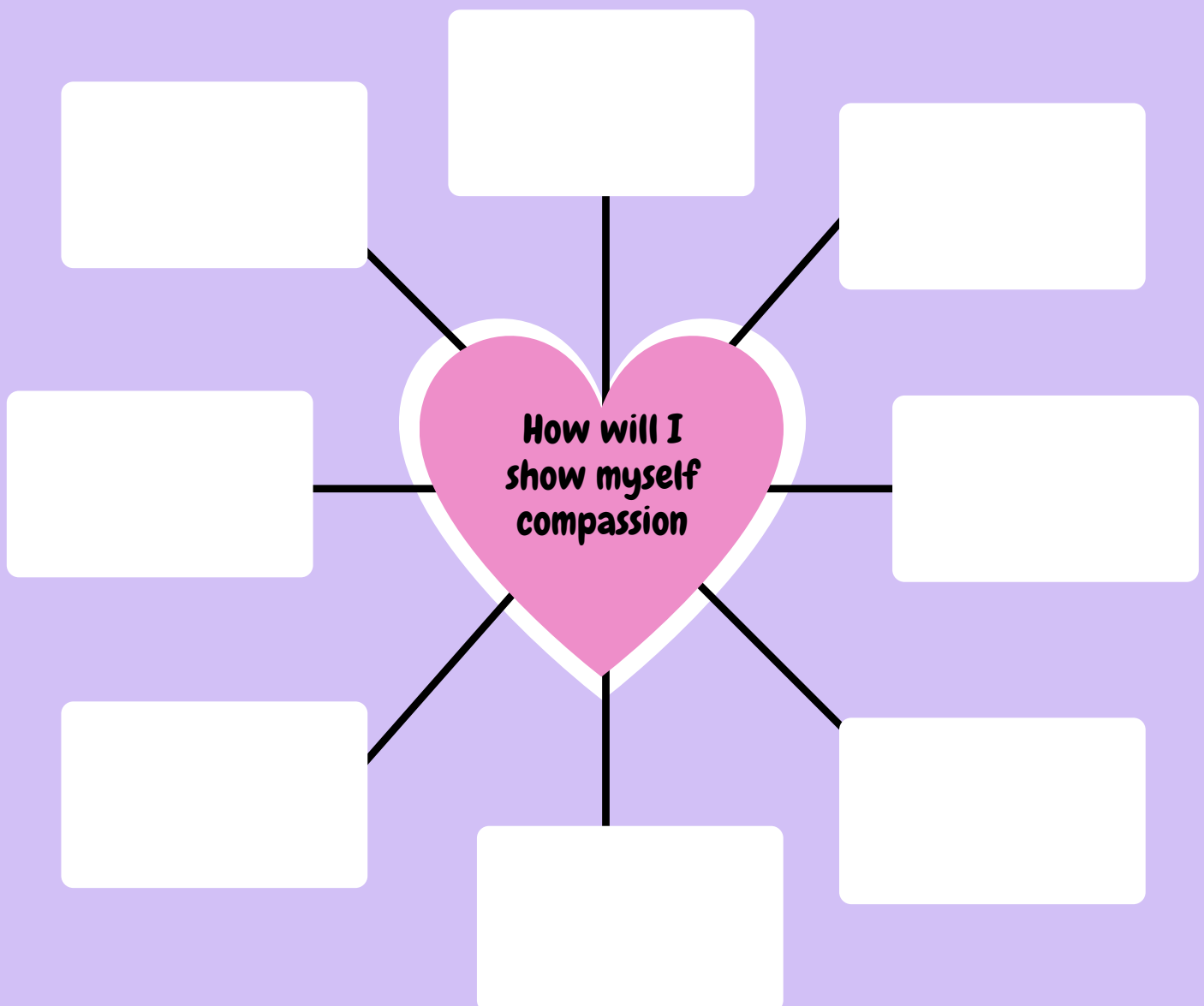


Activity

In the exercise below, take a moment to brainstorm some ways that you can show yourself compassion. We've included some examples to start you off. Remember - everyone shows self-compassion in different ways, there are no right or wrong answers.

Self-Compassion Examples

- Spending time with loved ones
- Forgiving yourself for mistakes
- Focusing on and prioritising your needs
- Using positive affirmations
- Spending time in a relaxing place (e.g. park, beach)
- Positive and kind self-talk
- Taking time out to recharge
- Doing an activity that brings you joy
- Taking a relaxing bath
- Meditating or using mindfulness exercises
- Celebrating your accomplishments
- Practising self-care
- Saying no to activities that don't make you feel good
- Eating your favourite meal
- Acknowledging or writing down your strengths



Practising Self-Compassion



Activity

Speaking to ourselves in a positive and compassionate way can sometimes be difficult. It may be helpful to plan out and rehearse what we can say to ourselves when we need compassion.

When I am struggling with how I feel about myself, I will tell myself...

When my confidence is low, I tell myself 'I am valuable' and list all of my strengths.



When I feel insecure about hearing voices, I remind myself 'I am more than just my voices! I'm a husband, a father, a musician...!'



When I am struggling with my voices, I will tell myself...

When I am struggling to connect or relate to others, I will tell myself.....

When I'm anxious meeting new people, I tell myself 'I've had traumatic experiences with new people before, so this is a normal reaction!'



When I make mistakes at work, I used to criticise myself. Now, I say 'I am human and I am allowed to make mistakes and can learn from them'.



When I make a mistake, I will tell myself...

When I fail at something, I will tell myself...

I struggle with failure, so when something doesn't go to plan, I try to tell myself 'failure is a normal and healthy part of life and helps me grow'.



My Emotional Systems

Practising self-compassion can give us the time and space to better understand our emotions, and how our mind and body respond to them. An important aspect of practising self-compassion is paying attention and responding to our emotional needs.

When engaging with our voices and practising self-compassion, it can be helpful to notice our emotional systems including our **threat**, **drive** and **soothing** systems. These systems work together and help us regulate our emotions, stay motivated, keep us safe and get through the difficult times. Let's explore these three systems in more detail below:



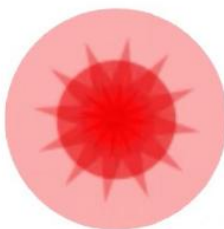
Drive System

The Drive System motivates us to move towards the things we need (e.g. shelter, food) and want (e.g. education, healthy relationships) in our lives. This system helps us to stay motivated so we can work towards these needs and wants.



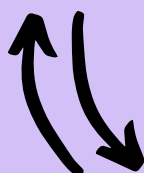
Soothing System

The Soothing System is vitally important in keeping balance in our lives. It helps to calm both the Threat and the Drive Systems, and maintain stability in our mind and body. It can be activated by engaging in activities or strategies that make us feel calm, relaxed or recharged.



Threat System

The Threat System is designed to detect threats, and gets our mind and body ready to spring into action. It can prime our body with adrenaline, and make our minds feel fear, anxiety and stress. It is vital to help us stay alert and survive.



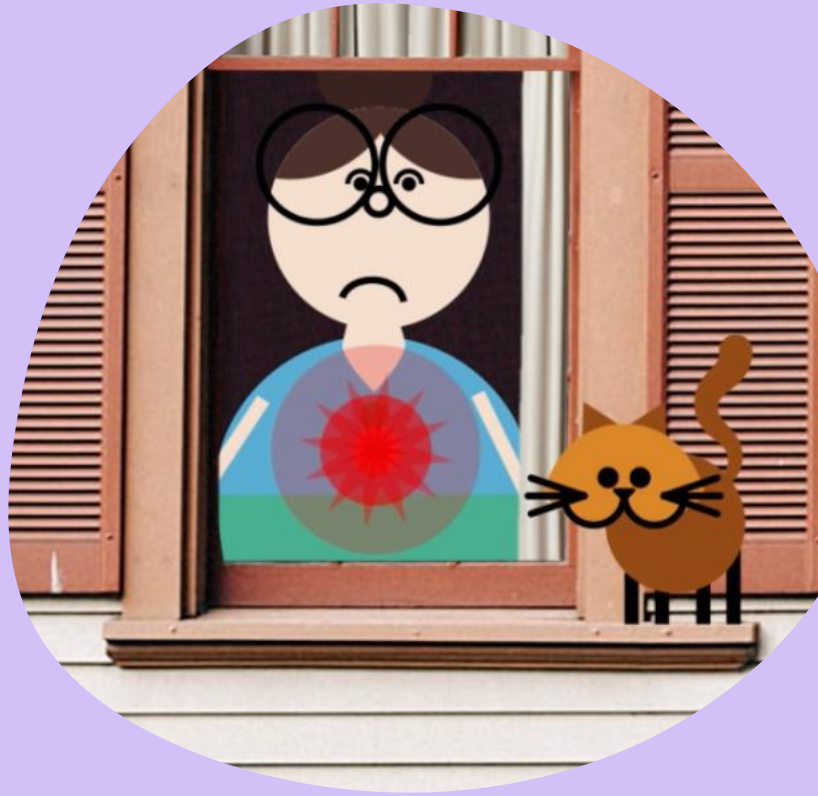
My Emotional Systems

Our emotional systems need to be balanced in order for us to feel safe, calm and motivated. We feel happier, more connected, and better able to deal with challenging moments.

When our systems become unbalanced, we may experience negative shifts in our mood or our voices can become louder or more critical. We can feel more stressed, upset, exhausted and disconnected from ourselves and those around us.

It's important to know what a balanced and unbalanced system looks like so we can either stay on track or make changes.

Take a look at some common indicators of balanced and unbalanced emotional systems below.



The Threat System

Balanced

When your threat system is balanced, you will feel you can respond to threats and calm yourself when the threat is gone. This can look like:

- Feeling it activate when there is a real threat such as pain, violence, sickness or injury
- Able to acknowledge when your threat system has been activated, then problem solve or self soothe to keep safe and calm
- Ability to maintain sustained alertness to survive (i.e. whilst driving, or crossing the road)
- Able to calm or reassure your voices when they are angry or threatening danger

Unbalanced

When your threat system is unbalanced, you may feel threatened in non-threatening situations. This feels like:

- Feeling as though you are threatened, panicked or in danger in safe or regular everyday situations
- Feeling constantly 'on-edge'
- Feeling physically tense in everyday situations
- Intrusive or distressing reminders of past trauma or flashbacks
- Feeling like people are constantly out to get you or want to harm you
- Being unable to calm your threat system using self-soothing activities

My Emotional Systems



The Drive System

Balanced

When your drive system is balanced, you may feel you are working towards the things you want and need in your life.

This can look like:

- Feeling motivated
- Setting and achieving goals or tasks
- Able to identify and use your strengths
- Feeling energised and focused
- Able to take a break or self soothe when you begin to feel overwhelmed or burnt out
- Living and acting in line with your values
- Maintaining a good work life balance

Unbalanced

Your drive system can be unbalanced in two ways - it can be under-active or over-active.

This can look like:

Under-Active

- Feeling unmotivated
- Finding it hard to stay focused
- Difficulty engaging in meaningful activities
- Lacking a sense of direction or purpose in life

Over-Active

- Not allowing time for leisure activities or fun
- Over-committing to work or study
- Obsessive thinking
- Being overly critical or perfectionistic
- Setting unrealistic or overly demanding goals



The Soothing System

Balanced

When your soothing system is balanced you are able to calm yourself when your threat or drive systems begin to take over. This looks like:

- Successfully self-soothing when feeling triggered, stressed or unsafe
- Feeling calm or at ease
- Practising self-compassion and self-care
- Feeling connected to your mind, body & surroundings
- Practising relaxation or mindfulness
- Speaking to yourself and your voices in a compassionate tone
- Taking breaks or resting when needed

Unbalanced

When your soothing system is unbalanced or underdeveloped, it can be challenging to calm yourself when needed. This looks like:

- Feeling disconnected from your mind, body or surroundings
- Unable to use self-soothe activities when you're feeling stressed, triggered or unsafe
- Threat and drive systems begin to dominate
- Voices become louder, critical or intrusive
- Feeling as though the voices are dominating
- Feeling tension in the body or racing thoughts
- Talking to yourself or your voices in a negative manner



Activity

In this activity, we are going to reflect on what each of our systems look like when they are balanced and unbalanced. Take a moment to reflect on your threat, drive and soothing systems. What do you feel and experience when these are balanced or unbalanced?



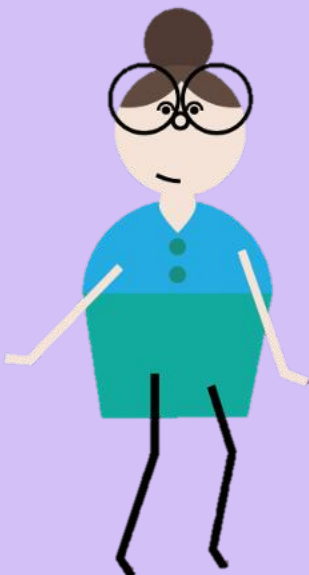
The Threat System

My Balanced Threat System:

Have there been times when your threat system has been of benefit to you (e.g. kept you safe, alert or away from danger)? When activated could it be easily soothed?

My Unbalanced Threat System:

Has your threat system activated when there is no danger? Did your threat system activate and interfere with meaningful activities? When activated could it be easily soothed?



Beth's Threat System

My Balanced Threat System:

- Keeps me alert and sensing danger when driving my car
- Makes me cautious and alerts me to actual danger or situations that are unsafe for me
- I can soothe myself effectively when I'm feeling under threat

My Unbalanced Threat System:

- I feel panicked in everyday situations I am familiar with
- My heart races and I start breathing faster
- I avoid going out of my house because I feel scared
- I feel like everyone is out to get me
- I struggle to self soothe



The Drive System

My Balanced Drive System:

Have there been times when you've felt more motivated or focused? Did you set goals and work towards them? Did you participate in the activities you like and enjoy?

My Unbalanced Drive System:

Have there been times when you've felt unmotivated or felt like you have no direction? Or have you felt burnt out or exhausted from overcommitting or not resting when you need to?



Josh's Drive System

My Balanced Drive System:

- I prioritise time with my friends and family
- I can focus and get tasks done
- I can concentrate on my work
- I make future plans for me and my family
- I act in line with my values
- I am able to acknowledge and use my strengths

My Unbalanced Drive System:

- I feel burnt out
- I don't have a good work life balance
- I cancel on my friends
- I feel unmotivated and lost
- I don't do the things I enjoy like skating and surfing
- I obsess and criticise myself
- I feel overwhelmed with life



The Soothing System

My Balanced Soothing System:

Have there been times when you feel you're able to calm yourself? Did you practise self-care? Did you participate in activities that bring you joy?

My Unbalanced Soothing System:

Have there been times when you feel you can't calm yourself down? Did you feel tense in your body? Did you feel disconnected?



Ella's Soothing System

My Balanced Soothing System

- I use my sensory box and it makes me feel calm and safe
- I use mindfulness to feel connected to my mind and body
- I am able to quieten my voices by reassuring them showing them compassion
- I feel relaxed and at peace

My Unbalanced Soothing System:

- I feel stressed and overwhelmed
- I feel it's more difficult to use my self-soothing strategies
- I feel disconnected from my body and surroundings
- I spend too much time relaxing and unwinding that I lose focus on my study

Building a Strong Soothing System



The Soothing System is important in maintaining stability and balancing out the Drive and Threat Systems. However, we often struggle to use this system. It's possible that past events and bad experiences can stop us using the system when we need it. Or we may lack self-compassion and believe we don't deserve to use it. Or we may have simply never learned how to use it.



Activity

Take a look at these common soothing activities, and think about the ones you could possibly use, and write them down below. Remember, everyone's Soothing System is different! You might have to try out a few of these activities first before you know if they work for you!



Soothing Activities I can use or try....

A Compassionate Approach Towards Voices

A compassionate approach towards voices involves harnessing a non-judgmental and open perspective and being curious about the voices' intention and meaning in your life. Many voice hearers that use this approach have discovered that their voices are often linked to difficult life experiences, distress or overwhelming emotions. Practising compassion towards your voices can foster a sense of safety, mutual respect and over time improve this relationship and lessen distress.

It can be really challenging to show your voices compassion especially when they are being critical or insulting towards you. This approach involves looking beyond what words or phrases the voices use, and exploring the deeper meaning of what the voices are trying to communicate or express to you.



Some curious questions you could ask your voices are.....

- What are you trying to communicate to me?
- Is that so, tell me more?
- What is the purpose of saying this?
- Thanks for letting me know that, how are you feeling?
- You sound (..angry, upset, scared) what do you need from me?



By getting to know the deeper meaning or intention behind what the voices are saying can also make it easier for you to show your voices compassion, and perhaps even express gratitude to them for communicating this to you.

I find it very difficult to be compassionate towards my voices when the voices are saying mean or critical things to me. When this happens, I find it helpful to ask myself these three questions....

1. What is the deeper meaning or intention?
2. What do the voices need or want from me?
3. How will I show them compassion?



A Compassionate Approach Towards Voices



Reflective Activity

Do you currently show your voices compassion? If not, what do you think stops you from doing so?



If you're not sure about this it may be helpful to brainstorm this with someone you trust.



Initially I wondered why would I be kind to my threatening voices? I began asking them more questions and realised they are actually warning me that I am feeling unsafe or anxious. Now that I know this, when they become critical or threatening I check in with what emotions I am feeling, thank the voices for alerting me to this and do my best to reassure them.

When my voices start to criticise me I have realised this is an indicator that I am not feeling good about myself. It's almost like my voices mimic how I'm really feeling deep down, especially when I get too busy to notice. I now thank my voices for letting me know I need some time out to self-care and be kinder towards myself.



My voice Vito usually says critical and mean things to me. By exploring my voices with my supports, I have now realised that when he appears something has activated my threat system or my past trauma. So now when he appears, I thank him for alerting me to this, talk to him in a compassionate tone and use my sensory box to self soothe and feel calm again.





Activity

Take a moment to think about the current interactions you're having with your voices and how you would usually respond to them. Then think about ways you could respond to be more curious, understanding or compassionate towards them.

**Something my voice usually says
or has said in the past**



**What I usually say back to
my voice**



**What I could say to be more curious
or compassionate**



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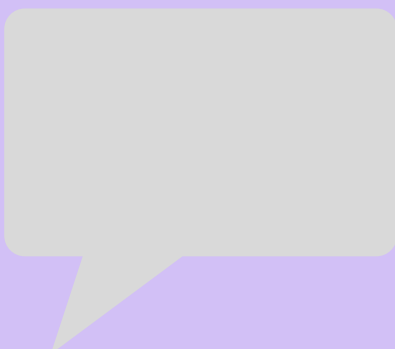
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**What I usually say back to
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**What I could say to be more curious
or compassionate**



Grounding and Mindfulness

Grounding and mindfulness exercises can be helpful for keeping us connected, calm and in a positive head space.

Grounding



Sometimes when things get tough, we can detach from our minds, our bodies, and the environment around us. Grounding exercises help guide us to rediscover that connection and 'ground' us in the present.

Below are some grounding activity cards that can be printed and cut out.

My Biography



Slowly and calmly list your name, your age, where you live, your hometown and the names of your family members and pets.

Breath Focus



Let your body relax. Breathe in through your nose for three counts, and out through your mouth for three counts.

Body Scan



Starting from your toes, imagine your awareness moving through each part of your body. Focus on how each part feels, and move it if you wish.

3 Things



Take a few moments to identify three things you can see, three things you can feel, three things you can hear, and three things you can smell.

My Safe Island



Sit or lay down somewhere quiet and safe. Imagine you are sitting on a small protective island. Visualise what this safe island looks like. Think about how you feel on this island. Think about the soothing techniques you use on this island. When you are ready, slowly leave the island.

Tipping the Temperature



Often when we are feeling distressed or overwhelmed our emotions are hot! You can try tipping the temperature by going for a swim, dipping your head in a bucket of cold water or placing a cold pack on your forehead. * *There is more info on this coping strategy in the resource section.*

Sweet or Sour



Place a sweet or sour lolly on your tongue. Notice how it tastes and how it makes you feel.

Get Back in Your Body



Try getting back into your body by doing some vigorous exercise, pushing your hands up against a wall (like you're trying to push it over) or stomping your feet on the ground.

Mindfulness



Mindfulness is about connecting to our thoughts, our feelings, our relationships and our memories. It allows us time to recognise and properly process emotions, experiences and events.

Below are some mindfulness activity cards that can be printed and cut out.

Mindful Appreciation

Take two or three minutes to think about five things that you appreciate that you don't normally notice.

Some examples could be 'flowers that bring beauty into the world' or 'my car for getting me to school'.



Observe My Thoughts

Sit in a quiet place with your eyes closed. Let your mind wander to wherever it needs to go. Notice your thoughts, but do not judge them.



Mindful Walking

Spend one to two minutes walking. Focus on the different sensations (e.g. the breeze on your face) and the things you can see. Try not to judge these things, simply notice them.



15 Minute Chat

Spend fifteen minutes with another person without distraction. Put away phones and turn off TVs. Simply sit together and talk.



5 Things I Am Grateful For

Take a few moments to list five things that you are grateful for in your life. It might help to write these down.



Mindful Listening

Play your favourite song. Listen to the music but try not to judge or analyse it. Don't worry about the words or genre. Just think about how the music feels.



Word Drawing

Grab a pen and paper. Pick a word from the list below, and draw anything that comes to mind when you think of it.



Words to use:

GROW YELLOW BREEZE
LOVE NOURISH DREAM

Memory Lane

Spend ten minutes writing down your favourite memory in detail.



Building a Sensory Box

What is a sensory box?

A sensory box is a container filled with items we can touch, hear, see, smell and taste. The main purpose of these items is to help ground, relax or soothe us. You can put anything you want in your sensory box. There are no rules about what should be included and you don't need to include something to activate each of your senses. In fact, some people may find that activating some senses can make them feel distressed or bring about bad feelings and sensations. Just put in things that work for you and keep you feeling safe.



Using a sensory box fits in nicely with showing self compassion as its key purpose is to soothe our body and mind when we are feeling overwhelmed, unsafe or our emotional systems become unbalanced....we can also use it just for enjoyment or to self-care!



See



Photos of good times



Lava lamps



Relaxing videos



Colouring books



Paintings or drawings



Comforting Mementos



Smell



Perfumes



Epsom salts



Dried flowers



Hand lotion



Candles



Incense



Spices



Oils



Hear



Music



Audio books



Guided meditation



Instruments



Wind chimes



Nature tracks



Podcasts



Taste



Sour lollies



Favourite meal



Chocolate



Herbal teas



Jelly beans



Flavoured chewing gum



Lollipops



Touch



Fabrics



Fidget toys



Kinetic sand



Squishy balls



Slime



Bubble wrap



Sponges

When my critical voices arise or I begin to feel unsafe I pull out my sensory box. I find soothing sounds and my fluffy weighted blanket the most helpful to bring back a sense of calm.



This video explores ways to self-soothe using your 5 senses
<https://youtu.be/CwnHez9TC6c>

Some textures and smells remind me of past bad experiences, so my box is filled with things I can see, like paintings, photos, and colouring books! I also have photos of my favourite memories as these take me to a happy place.

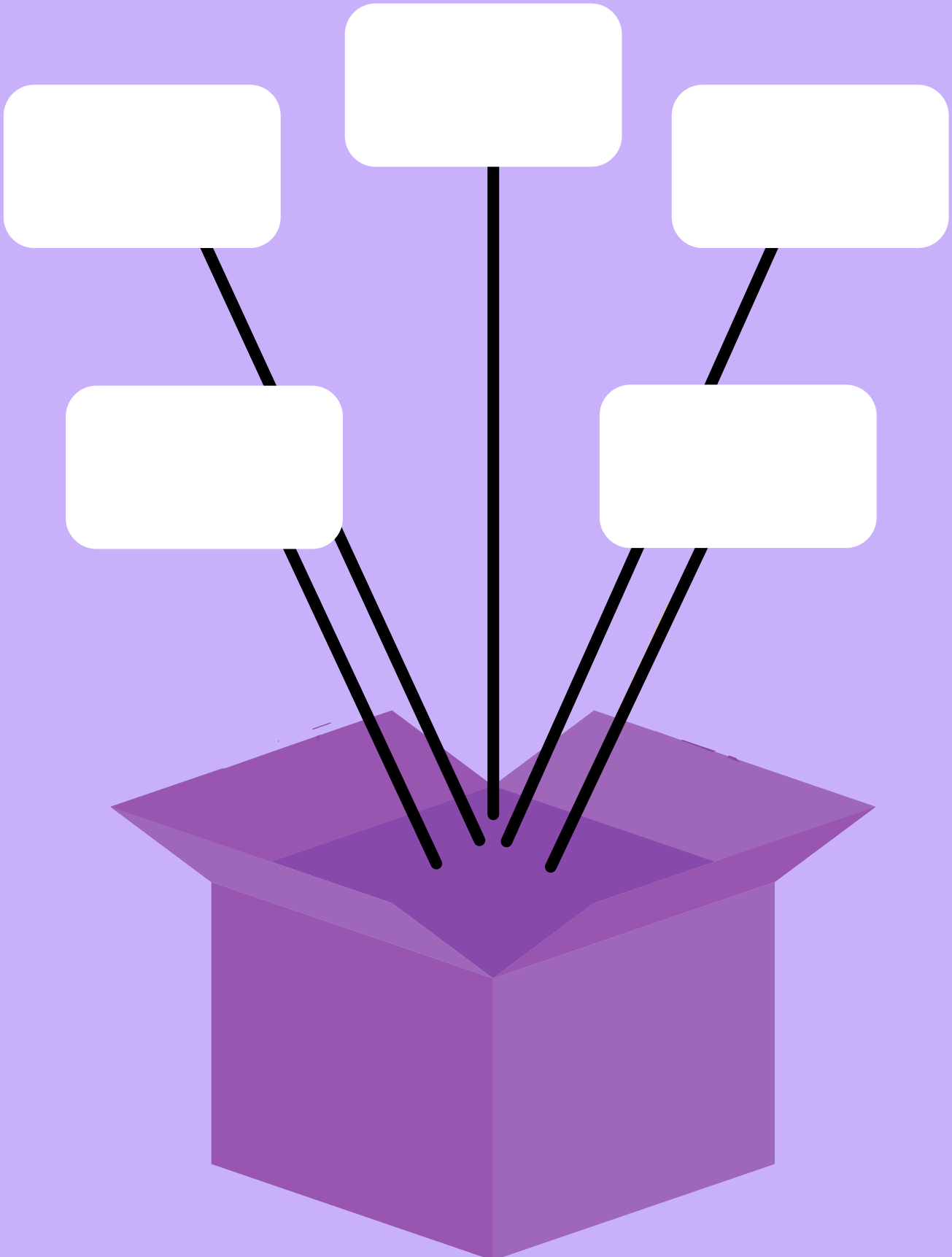


My Sensory Box



Activity

Write a few ideas for your sensory box in the spaces below. You can use the lists on page 16 for inspiration or come up with your own ideas!





Congratulations!

You have completed all the worksheets for 'The Compassionate Approach'! Great job!

Want to keep exploring and working with your voices?

Take a look at these videos and worksheets:



**Introduction to
Hearing Voices**



The Big Questions



**Exploring
Recovery**



**Navigating the
Tough Times**



**Practical Coping
Strategies**



**Exploring and
Explaining Voices**

Reference List

Gilbert, P. (2010). Compassion focused therapy: Distinctive features. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Compassion for Voices (2022). Compassion for Voices– Compassionate approaches to voices and other experiences.

www.compassionforvoices.com